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Message Text

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ACTION EA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSCE-00 PM-03 SP-02 L-01
INR-05 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 DODE-00 EB-04 TRSE-00
OMB-01 OIC-01 /038 W
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P R 020420Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3964
INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 12612

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ASEAN, TH
SUBJECT: US-ASEAN DIALOGUE

REF: MANILA 06740

1. EMBASSY OFFICER MAY 1 DISCUSSED RECENT STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING AND FORTHCOMING US-ASEAN WASHINGTON CONSULTATIONS WITH SECRETARY-GENERAL, ASEAN DIVISION, MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS THEP THEWAKUL, WHO HAD JUST RETURNED FROM JAKARTA ASEAN MEETING.

2. THEP STATED IT WAS FOREGONE CONCLUSION THAT ASEAN ACCEPTS WASHINGTON MEETING AUGUST 3-4 AND THAT THE FIVE WILL FIELD A TEAM OF MINISTERS. HE REITERATED RTG WAS APPREHENSIVE AND HOPED WASHINGTON MEETING WOULD MAKE SUBSTANTIVE PROGRESS. HIS EX-PRESSION OF ANXIETY IS CONSISTENT WITH HIS EARLIER REMARKS ON THE SUBJECT, PREVIOUSLY REPORTED. THEP CONTENDED ASEAN WOULD WORK OUT ITS POSITIONS WELL IN ADVANCE OF THE AUGUST MEETING. GIVEN THE AWKWARD ASEAN MECHANISM, ALL
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DECISIONS CANNOT BE TAKEN AT ONCE. HE SAID THE CURRENT LINEUP FOR WASHINGTON WAS PHILIPPINES (ROMULO), SINGAPORE (RAJARATHNAM), INDONESIA (RADIUS) AND THAT UPPADIT STILL EXPECTED TO ATTEND FOR THAILAND. MALAYSIAN REPRESENTATION WAS NOT, AS YET, KNOWN TO HIM.

3. THEP INDICATED THE WASHINGTON-BASED ASEAN AMBASSADORS

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HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO WORK CLOSELY WITH THE USG ON PREPARATIONS FOR THE MINISTERIAL MEETING. HE FELT THEY COULD CONTRIBUTE TOWARD THE MEETING BY IDENTIFYING AREAS OF COMMON INTEREST, THEREBY HELPING TO DRAFT A PRACTICAL AGENDA.

4. ON THE DEVELOPMENT SIDE, THEP DECLARED THAT THE ASEAN MEMBERS WERE INDIVIDUALLY DRAWING UP A LIST OF PROPOSED PROJECTS FOR THE ASEAN EXPERTS AND PREPARATORY MEETING TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE JOINT WORKING GROUP MEETING WITH THE U.S. MAY 30-31 IN MANILA. THE RESULTS WOULD THEN BE INCORPORATED INTO THE FINAL AGENDA FOR THE WASHINGTON MINISTERIAL.

5. DESPITE THEP'S NORMALLY CALM ATTITUDE AND HIS VIEW THAT THE US-ASEAN DIALOGUE IS GRADUALLY FALLING INTO PLACE, IT IS CLEAR HE IS FEELING THE PRESSURE IN TRYING TO KEEP UP WITH THE INNUMERABLE MEETINGS AND FLOOD OF PAPER.

6. IN SEPARATE CONVERSATION WITH DCM, POLITICAL DEPART-MENT DIRECTOR-GENERAL OWAT SUTTHIWATNARUPHUT SAID HE HAD TRAVELLED WITH FOREIGN MINISTER UPPADIT TO ASEAN CAPITALS EARLIER IN MARCH AND HAD IMPRESSION THAT UPPADIT AND OTHER ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS WERE ESSENTIALLY IN AGREE-MENT ON WASHINGTON MINISTERIAL MEETING AUGUST 3-4.
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7. HOWEVER, TO OWAT'S SURPRISE, THE APRIL 20-22 STANDING COMMITTEE SESSION TOOK A MUCH MORE CAUTIOUS VIEW. ALTHOUGH HE WAS NOT PRESENT, OWAT LEARNED LATER THAT UPPADIT AND SOME OF THE ASEAN AMBASSADORS PRESENT ENGAGED IN AN EXTENSIVE INCONCLUSIVE EXCHANGE ON THE WASHINGTON MEETING. THERE HAD BEEN AGREEMENT THAT AUGUST 3-4 DATES WERE ACCEPTABLE. HOWEVER, ON THE QUESTION OF MINISTERIAL PARTICIPATION, UPPAIDT AND SOME OTHERS STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF A VISIBLE, SUBSTANTIVE RESULT EMANATING FROM THE MEETING TO JUSTIFY THE PRESENCE OF ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS IN WASHINGTON. UPPADIT, AND PRESUMABLY OTHERS, WERE PARTICULARLY SENSITIVE TO EXPOSING THEMSELVES TO POSSIBLE PRESS CHARGES THAT THEY HAD RETURNED FROM WASHINGTON EMPTY HANDED. OWAT SAID DISCUSSION CENTERED LESS ON QUESTION OF WHETHER THERE SHOULD BE MINISTERIAL PARTICIPATION THAN FOCUSSING ON MEANS OF SECURING SOME GUARANTEE TO JUSTIFY THE INVOLVEMENT OF FOREIGN MINISTERS. DCM EXPLAINED OUR VIEWS,ENCOURAGING OWAT TO WEIGH RELATIVE BENEFIT OF MINISTERIAL LEVEL SESSION IN TERMS OF HIGHLIGHTING ASEAN PROGRESS AND ITS ECONOMIC CONCERNS.

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8. OWAT GAVE AS HIS PERSONAL VIEW THAT THE ASEAN GOVERNMENTS WOULD EVENTUALLY AGREE ON MINISTERIAL LEVEL PARTICIPANTS BUT NOTED FORMAL DECISION WOULD ONLY BE MADE AT THE JUNE 13-15 ANNUAL ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING IN BANGKOK.

9. COMMENT: RE REFTEL, OWAT DID NOT ALLUDE TO ANY POSSIBLE VIETNAMESE RESENTMENT AS A FACTOR INFLUENCING UPPADIT TO EXPRESS CONCERN ABOUT ATTENDANCE BY MINISTERS. HOWEVER, WE CANNOT RULE THIS OUT COMPLETELY SINCE UPPADIT PARTICULARLY WOULD BE SENSITIVE TO A US-ASEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING BEING MISCONSTRUED BY VIETNAMESE AS A RECONSTRUCTION OF SEATO. WE DO BELIEVE UPPADIT'S BASIC CONERN WOULD BE NEED HE PERCEIVES FOR CONFIDENTIAL

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VISIBLE RESULTS AT US-ASEAN WASHINGTON MEETING. UPPADIT'S PRESS IMAGE IS NOT GOOD, AND HE IS SUBJECT OF CONSIDERABLE BACK ROOM CRITICISM IN GOVERNMENT CIRCLES.
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